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Human resources management

Recruitment and staffing in the United Nations: strategy going forward

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

In the light of the priority that the Secretary-General places on improving and modernizing recruitment and staffing in the Organization, and pursuant to the request by the General Assembly in its resolution 61/244 to further elaborate the use of pre-screened rosters, the present report provides the Assembly with information on progress made in advancing the reform proposals on recruitment and staffing presented in his reports "Investing in people" (A/61/255) and "Human resources management reform: recruitment and staffing" (A/61/822).

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I. Introduction

1. In 2007, in his address to the General Assembly, "A stronger United Nations for a better world, the Secretary-General set out a compelling vision for the reform of the management of the Organization in order to meet its increasingly complex and interrelated mandates. He stated:

> "We need to think freshly about how we do our work. Our main themes should be to simplify, rationalize and delegate. To deliver on the world's high expectations for us, we need to be faster, more flexible and mobile. We need to pay less attention to rhetoric, and more attention to results — to getting things done. I place a very high priority on implementing the management reforms you have previously approved to promote greater transparency, accountability and efficiency. To be more responsive and nimble in meeting the changing demands of today's global environment, we must better manage United Nations human resources, our most vital asset. We need an internal climate change at the United Nations. We must build a more skilled and mobile workforce."

2. A human resources management framework that supports an independent international civil service with the highest standards of performance and accountability is one of the cornerstones of the Secretary-General's vision. The goal is to build a multi-skilled, versatile and mobile staff to fulfil the Organization's complex and interrelated mandates. To respond to the changing demands placed on it by the Member States, the Organization itself has evolved from being largely Headquarters-based to one which has over half its staff in numerous field locations performing tasks of increasing complexity and scope over a broad range of functions. Recent trends point to a steady increase in staff numbers, mainly due to the expansion of mandates in the field. In 2006, there were over 31,000 civilian staff members of all types in all locations. In 2007, this number increased to over 36,500 and by June 2008 the number of civilian staff had reached almost 40,000. This represents a 25 per cent increase in only two years. There is a concomitant increase in the number of experienced staff who will be retiring in the next four years, in particular at the D-1 and higher levels, with over 40 per cent of this group retiring by 2012.

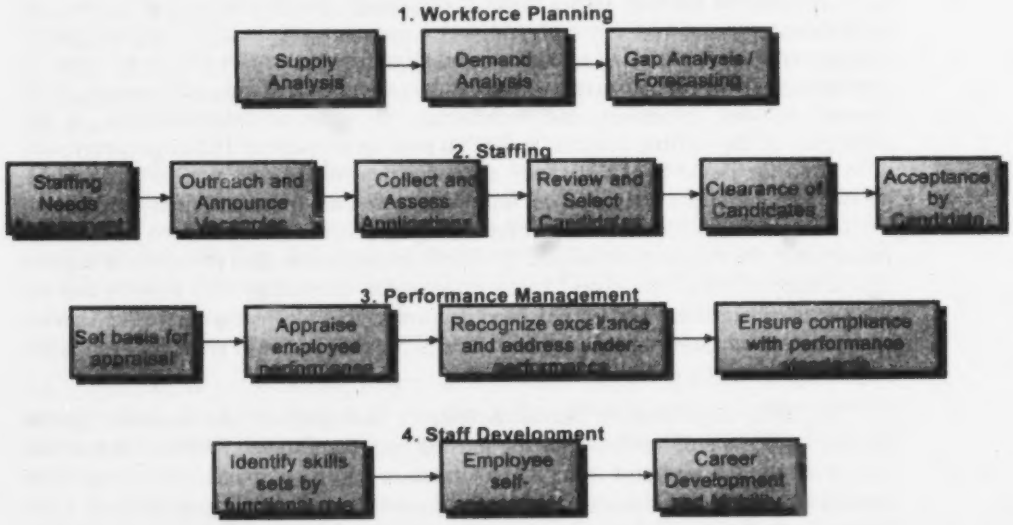
3. Meeting the challenges of attracting, developing and retaining motivated staff of the highest calibre and dealing with the upcoming wave of retirements requires new strategies and more streamlined and efficient processes, technological infrastructure and economies of scale in carrying out administrative processes. Key to addressing the challenges are the Secretary-General's proposals on the introduction of one contract and the harmonization of conditions of service throughout the United Nations system. In moving forward with a new construct for staffing and recruitment, there is need to integrate the various policies and processes that currently underpin the management of talent through strategic workforce planning, recruitment and targeted outreach, staffing, career development and performance management. Such an integrated approach is the basis for the new talent management framework, introduced in the report of the Secretary-General, "Investing in people" (A/61/255).

4. An important goal of the integrated approach is to ensure that there is always a pool of highly qualified and motivated individuals available to pursue the

Organization's mandates and to better serve the needs of the Member States. The proposed staffing system will be designed to ensure that the paramount consideration in the employment of the staff is to secure the highest standards of efficiency, competency and integrity, as required by Article 101, paragraph 3, of the Charter of the United Nations, while ensuring due regard for geographical representation and gender balance. The Secretary-General views the introduction of a talent management framework, of which rosters are an important element, as a crucial step in order to speed up recruitment and ensure that the United Nations is better equipped to meet current and future staffing needs, while increasing the opportunities for career development for staff. The target is to reduce the time taken to fill vacancies from the current average of 162 days (previously 174) to 100 days once all the elements of the framework are in place. Two of the four elements of the talent management framework (workforce planning and staffing and recruitment) and the use of rosters for delivering better results are described below.

II. Strategic workforce planning

Figure 1
Talent management framework



5. The first element in the new talent management framework is strategic workforce planning, which enables the Organization to undertake proactive efforts to meet its current and future needs. It provides managers with the foundation for projecting staffing trends based on the Organization's mandates, strategic plans, budgetary resources, skills and desired competencies. While several departments have been engaged in the past in workforce planning exercises, including the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Department of Field Support, such exercises have not been systematically carried out. In 2008, the Secretary-General requested heads of all departments to engage in strategic workforce planning with the aim of identifying core skills for succession planning, identification and analysis

of gaps in the workforce, supply and demand analysis, planning for succession and addressing the high rate of upcoming retirements in a more systematic and cross-organizational manner.

6. Workforce planning, which seeks to establish a multi-year forecast of the staff resources that would be needed to support current and new mandates in the short and medium terms, captures the strategic direction of staffing of the Organization. Such a forecast would take account of projected retirements, average time in post in a given period and a projection of the workforce demand for the same period. Supply and demand analyses will determine likely gaps in workforce availability. In addition, it will facilitate more proactive outreach efforts to ensure the availability of a pool of qualified candidates of appropriate diversity in terms of geographical representation and gender, including occupational groups, and will thus support the effective implementation and management of rosters. It is expected that workforce planning will support the staffing of the Organization; help address the high attrition rates, including through retirements and turnover; support the enhancement of staff skills to meet anticipated needs; and enable more targeted outreach exercises.

A. Meeting organizational staffing needs

7. The second element in the talent management framework is staffing through recruitment and targeted outreach and roster management. In 2007, approximately 5,000 people were recruited to serve in the Organization worldwide on all types of contracts, a level of recruitment that is increasingly difficult to manage given current policies, processes and technology. In spite of improvements in the efficiency of the staffing process, in 2007 it took an average of 162 days (previously 174) from the issuance of a vacancy announcement to the selection of a candidate. These data highlight the need to introduce new and more efficient methods of recruitment, in particular a roster-based staffing process. Work started in 2007 to: (a) develop the business processes for talent management; and (b) select a support tool to support those processes. A new information technology (IT) support tool for the talent management system has been acquired. This tool is crucial to the success of roster-based staffing as it will integrate the various elements of talent management set out in figure 1.

8. In 2007, the Office of Human Resources Management spearheaded a global business process redesign exercise for staffing and recruitment processes. One of the outcomes of the exercise was a reaffirmation by participants, including from participants from offices away from Headquarters and the Department of Field Support, on the suitability of a roster-based approach to addressing the staffing needs of the Organization. Participants in the Staff-Management Coordination Committee meeting, held in New York in June 2008, also supported recommendations for roster-based selection. Staff pointed out that to make the roster system more transparent and effective, it was important to provide rostered candidates with feedback on their status in the recruitment process. The new talent management system is designed to address those concerns.

B. Benefits of using pre-screened rosters

9. The General Assembly, in its resolution 61/244, recognized that pre-screened rosters can considerably expedite the recruitment process in the United Nations. The

use of a roster-based staffing system will bring a number of benefits to the Organization, including efficiency, quality, speed and consistency. The proposed process to fill vacancies will expedite and streamline the staff selection process, enhance transparency and discourage duplication of effort. Unlike the current staff selection system, where rosters are limited to those applicants who were recommended but not selected for specific vacancies, the proposed rosters will accommodate a variety of staffing needs, reduce delays and significantly shorten the time required to fill a vacancy.

10. Rosters are already being used to fill a large number of vacancies in the Organization, including posts that are subject to competitive examinations, such as those for P-2 posts and language posts, and posts at the entry levels of the General Service and related categories. Rosters are also the primary mechanism used for filling posts at field missions administered by the Department of Field Support. Through a sampling of cases at those missions, the Office of Internal Oversight Services observed that, as recorded in the Integrated Management Information System (IMIS), the average number of days from the issuance of a vacancy announcement to the selected candidate's start date was 139 days. Those results do not reflect the expected impact of the ongoing business process improvement methods currently being applied by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Department of Field Support to staffing in the field. Rosters are also used for field posts such as those administered by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. The lessons learned from rosters already in use, such as those in the staffing of peacekeeping and political missions and in the national competitive recruitment examination, will be applied in the design of the staffing process.

11. The roster-based staffing system will be used for all types of staff and personnel, including consultants and individual contractors. The use of rosters is an opportunity to align the different methods of recruiting and placing staff and other personnel and will thus contribute to the greater integration of the Secretariat. The use of common processes and a shared IT platform will allow for both synergies and efficiencies to be achieved in the filling of vacancies at Headquarters, other established duty stations and field-based operations.

12. The use of pre-screened rosters will ensure that the quality of candidates remains high. With the support of the new talent management tool, the screening process will ensure that the best candidates are available for selection from the roster.

13. In a situation of rapidly evolving needs, rosters enable the prompt deployment of qualified staff and ensure that candidates are available for occupations where the need for additional staff exists. In addition, roster-based staffing provides a global picture of the Organization's human resources needs by taking into consideration requirements across various departments and offices.

14. Prior to being placed on rosters, applications will be subject to a preliminary automated screening process. Candidates who pass the preliminary screening will be rigorously evaluated through reviews by experts in relevant fields, endorsement by central review bodies and administrative clearance, including reference checks for external candidates. The result will be a pool of qualified candidates ready, willing and able to step into specific roles anywhere in the Secretariat. The review will ensure that the most suitable candidates are identified while taking into

consideration the way they could meet the Organization's policies on geographical representation and gender balance.

15. The current staff selection system for posts at Headquarters and established duty stations is reactive. The use of a roster-based system supported by workforce planning represents a proactive approach to staffing. A roster-based process will permit more rapid selection than is currently possible while ensuring that the quality of staff remains at the highest level. Programme managers will find that they are able to fill vacancies more quickly than in the past. The rigorous review preceding admission to a roster will improve the quality of candidates presented to programme managers.

16. The use of rosters will allow the Organization to organize longer-term targeted outreach activities to address the need to find candidates to meet geographical and gender targets, and the results of the outreach activities will enable the Organization to achieve better results in meeting those targets.

C. Roster-based staffing process

17. The following elements will support the roster-based process: workforce planning; generic vacancy announcements; panels of experts in relevant fields; central review bodies; and centralized background checking and help desk support.

18. Based on the findings of workforce planning, the Organization's staffing needs will be transmitted through advertising and outreach for the types of posts that need to be filled. It is proposed that generic vacancy announcements, based on the current generic job profiles, will be published based on projected needs determined through workforce planning. Since their introduction in 2002, generic job profiles have been developed and standardized continuously, and their use has become more widespread. Some 300 generic profiles are available to managers online.

19. Generic vacancy announcements will be used to advertise openings identified through workforce planning. Candidates will apply to generic vacancy announcements for similar posts in an occupational group. For example, based on the findings of workforce planning, a generic vacancy announcement for economic affairs officers at the P-4 level would be advertised to create a pool of candidates for vacancies that are projected to arise in this category and level Secretariat-wide. The use of generic vacancy announcements will serve to further streamline the recruitment process and provide greater consistency throughout the Organization. Based on the positive experience in recent years with the generic job profiles, central review bodies will no longer be required to review evaluation criteria before issuing vacancy announcements. The latter was agreed at the twenty-ninth meeting of the Staff-Management Coordination Committee in 2008.

20. Generic vacancy announcements will be advertised for 60 days to enable the creation of viable rosters that yield sufficient numbers of qualified candidates, in keeping with General Assembly resolution 59/266. Should the need for more candidates arise, the vacancy announcements may be reissued or extended. In some cases, open-ended vacancy announcements may be used, as is currently the practice in advertising by the Department of Field Support for field-based posts, as approved by the Assembly in its resolution 59/296.

21. In reference to the time period for the advertisement of generic vacancy announcements, experience with the 60-day advertisement period for single vacancies over recent years shows that most candidates apply well before the deadline. In the light of that experience, it is proposed that the General Assembly reduce the current period for advertising individual vacancies from 60 to 30 days. This measure would significantly contribute to shortening the time period needed to fill vacancies. Concerns have been expressed by Member States that reducing the period of advertising vacancies from 60 days to a shorter period would disadvantage potential candidates from some Member States with limited access to the United Nations website due to gaps in technology. However, a review of applications received through the website indicates that the technology gap is becoming less of an issue. In 2007, for example, over 500,000 applications were received from 189 countries through the website. The Member States from which there were no applications in 2007 were from countries where the lack of applications cannot be explained by any gap in technology.

22. The reduction of the advertisement period to 30 days will also apply to the issuance of individual vacancy announcements under the new roster-based system. It is recognized that rostering will not be suitable for all types of positions in the Organization. The Office of Human Resources Management will permit the issuance of individual vacancy announcements in situations where the roster cannot produce suitable candidates or for posts at high levels and/or of a specialized nature. For example, a position with unique requirements in a highly technical area may require the issuance of an individual vacancy announcement. The selection process will follow the staff selection system.

23. After applying to a generic vacancy announcement, a candidate will be screened for eligibility and basic suitability by human resources officers supported by the IT tool. Human resources officers will forward lists of candidates to panels of experts in a given occupational group, which would determine the suitability of both internal and external candidates for the types of occupations and levels for which they have expressed interest. The review will include competency-based interviews by experts in relevant fields and through other assessment methods, as appropriate.

24. Before placement on the roster, central review bodies, which are joint staff-management bodies, will review the process leading to the placement on the roster. These bodies determine whether the process has been conducted in a fair and transparent manner in accordance with the relevant rules and procedures. Central review bodies have been established throughout the Secretariat, with the process well under way for peacekeeping positions. In 2008, the Department of Field Support established the parameters for a system of central review bodies for field positions that includes experts in a number of specialized fields and, at the time of writing, was taking the necessary steps, in consultation with the Field Staff Union, to establish those bodies.

25. The rosters will be made up of candidates who have been deemed suitable, whose backgrounds have been verified and who are ready to be selected for available positions in the United Nations. Names of rostered candidates will be made available to programme managers. Candidates on the roster will be identified to show whether they are staff members, which competitive examination they have been successful in and will include the representation status of the Member State of their nationality. This will ensure that attention is drawn to aspects of their

candidature related to the Organization's mandates and rules. Internal staff members will have to be reviewed and given full consideration in accordance with staff regulation 4.4, which requires that "the fullest regard shall be had, in filling vacancies, to the requisite qualifications and experience of persons already in the service of the United Nations".

26. Following the publication of generic vacancy announcements, as specific vacancies arise they will be published for up to 30 days on the United Nations website in order to inform the public, staff and Member States of the availability of specific posts to be filled from the roster. Candidates on the roster for the available occupational group, category and level would be informed of the vacancy and may confirm their interest. The filling of the vacant post will be effected solely through the roster of candidates pre-approved for that occupational group and level.

27. Staffing decisions are made by heads of department and office within the authority delegated to them from the Secretary-General. In making selection decisions, heads of departments and office are guided by the Charter of the United Nations, legislative mandates, including mandates on geographical distribution and gender balance, and the relevant regulations, rules and administrative instructions. Senior managers compacts with the Secretary-General and human resources action plans represent commitments of heads of departments and office to achieve practical and measurable targets in the areas of staffing and recruitment.

D. Roster management

28. Rosters will be actively managed to ensure that candidates are available and interested in specific vacancies and that there are sufficient numbers of candidates for selection for current and anticipated vacancies. Candidates will normally remain on the roster for three years, with the possibility of extension for a further two years if they confirm their interest and availability. At the end of five years, candidates will normally be removed from the roster. Candidates may continue to apply for generic vacancy announcements as they arise, and will be contacted periodically during the rostering period to ascertain their continued availability and interest. The ratio of applicants to available posts will be identified through workforce planning. It is envisaged that, for a viable roster system, it will be necessary to maintain a ratio of (up to) 5.1 for the number of candidates on the roster to the number of vacancies available.

29. Experience has shown that one of the major challenges in the staffing system is the high volume of applications for jobs. The introduction of Galaxy, the online electronic staffing tool, resulted in a tremendous increase in the number of applications to posts, in particular from external candidates. It is difficult for all participants in the review process to handle the large volume of applications and to ensure that all qualified candidates are considered. Galaxy, although it has some features that facilitate the review of candidates, has proven to be an inadequate tool for the task at hand.

30. The new electronic talent management framework will enable automated screening and the use of more sophisticated means to assist in finding the most suitable candidates. This will be a crucial step in saving time in the screening and review of candidates and facilitating the high volume of applications, which number over half a million annually. The framework will include advance search facilities,

online filtering and reporting abilities and analytical capacity, which will enable users to manage a large number of applications efficiently while ensuring the application of standards across the staffing process. It will be possible to link information in personal history profiles, vacancy announcements and evaluation criteria using competencies and skills as the underlying foundation. That same foundation will also be the basis for performance management and career development. Extensive online help features will guide users in every step in order to ensure ease of use and understanding of the process.

31. To ensure that the most suitable candidates are selected, several elements must be enhanced and integrated. The link between the requirements of a position, the personal history profile and the evaluation of candidates will be created in order to ensure that alignment between all phases of the review process is improved and that the candidates who best meet the requirements are rostered and selected. The redesign of the application process is key to bringing about a more structured and systematic way of capturing a candidate's experience, qualifications and skills. These will facilitate more effective matching of candidates to both generic and specific vacancy announcements and the evaluation of candidates to determine where they best match the Organization's requirements.

32. Another challenge in the staffing process is the review of candidates' references, employment history and educational credentials. In order to ensure standardization and economies of scale, reduce duplication of work and profit from related efficiencies, it is proposed that these tasks be performed in a more centralized manner.

33. Outreach activities will be expanded significantly in order to address geographical and gender mandates and occupations for which candidates cannot easily be identified through the issuance of vacancy announcements. Outreach activities, including collaboration with professional associations, governmental entities and non-governmental organizations, will provide candidates for the rosters through the staffing process described above.

E. Linkage with other reforms in talent management

34. Systematic workforce planning and recruitment based on pre-screened rosters are part of a broader integrated talent management framework. These measures, when combined with the Secretary-General's proposals to strengthen leadership and management capacity, enhance mobility and introduce occupational networks, improve career development and performance management will be instrumental for the attainment of the Secretary-General's vision of attracting, recruiting, retaining and developing a highly skilled and performance-driven workforce. In the same manner, the Secretary-General's proposals on streamlining of contractual arrangements and harmonization of conditions of service in the field will result in a more integrated, field-oriented and global workforce.

III. Implementation: phased approach

35. The Secretary-General proposes to commence preparatory work on the roster-based system in January 2009. It is also proposed that rosters be phased in for

certain types of functions, in addition to the already existing rosters, starting in July 2009, as a transitional measure before full-scale application by the end of 2009. In that way, the new work processes involved in the application of the roster system can be tested and refined.

36. In order to handle the anticipated large increase in workload for the clearance of candidates (three times the current volume) and in support provided to users, both external and internal, any associated resource requirements that may be necessary will be considered in the context of the budgetary framework for the biennium 2010-2011.

IV. Actions to be taken by the General Assembly

37. **The General Assembly is requested to approve:**

(a) **The establishment of a roster-based approach for selection of staff for an initial period of one year;**

(b) **The reduction in the period for the circulation of specific vacancy announcements from 60 days to 30 days.**